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COMMITTEE OF IMPERIAL DEFENCE.

ANGLO-POLISH STAFF CONVERSATIONS.

Memorandum by the Minister for Co-ordination of Defence.

THE attached report on Anglo-Polish Staff Conversations (Enclosure II) and a commentary thereon by the Deputy Chiefs of Staff Sub-Committee (Enclosure I), is circulated for consideration of the Committee of Imperial Defence. The Annexes to the report have not been reproduced, as they contain details which are unnecessary to a consideration of the principles involved.

2. The salient points in the Delegation's Report are dealt with in the commentary, and these are mainly of an informative character. It will be noted that the Deputy Chiefs of Staff form the opinion that the Poles tend to underrate the German strength, and overrate their own (paragraphs 9 and 14).

3. With regard to air operations, the Deputy Chiefs of Staff show the importance of ensuring that an agreed policy is concerted with the Poles as to air objectives (paragraph 17). It would, for example, be disastrous if the Poles attacked Berlin before Germany had shown her hand.

4. In paragraph 19, the Deputy Chiefs of Staff recommend that discussions should be initiated with the Polish Staffs, with regard to operating a certain number of our bombers from Polish aerodromes and, if the conversations are satisfactory, that the Air Ministry should be authorised to despatch stocks of bombs and maintenance stores to Poland.

5. The question of further Staff contacts and the possibility of including the French, referred to in paragraph 22 of the commentary, is being taken up with the Poles by General Ironside during his visit to Warsaw.

(Initialled) C.

Richmond Terrace, S.W. 1,
July 17, 1939.

[D.C.O.S. 127.]

ENCLOSURE No. I.

Anglo-Polish Staff Conversations.

REPORT BY THE UNITED KINGDOM DELEGATION.

Commentary by the Deputy Chiefs of Staff Sub-Committee.

WE have examined the report of the British Delegation to Poland on their recent conversations with the Polish Staff* and have the following comments to make :—

Political (paragraphs 4–8 of the Report).

2. The Polish views on the probable alignment of the Powers differ from our own only in respect of Hungary, whom they credit with the intention of resisting any exploitation by Germany. In our view the attitude of Hungary is likely to be dictated by the facts of the military situation rather than by the sentiments of the Hungarian people or their rulers. The only hope of getting Hungary to resist is that she should be assured beforehand of a united Balkan *bloc* behind her. This seems impossible unless Bulgaria can be induced to line up with Turkey and Roumania.

3. At the time of the conversations the Polish attitude to Russia appeared to be growing less intransigent than formerly, but we might perhaps impress upon the Poles again, when the opportunity occurs, that Russia is likely to be the only source from which they will be able to augment their own military resources in the event of war against Germany.

4. The provisional assurance of our support in the event of an attack on Lithuania which has been given by the Head of the Delegation (paragraph 8 of the report) is, of course, not satisfactory, and this point has been referred to the Foreign Office.

Strategical.

5. The Poles are convinced that the Germans will, at the beginning of the war, concentrate against Poland, remaining on the defensive elsewhere. They have consequently based all their plans on this conception, which is to them the "worst case," and appear to have considered no alternative. Although we agree that this is the most probable German course of action we suggest the Poles ought to be asked to consider the possibility that the weight of German attack in the East might be directed on Roumania instead of Poland. We feel that there are economic reasons which might force the Germans to adopt this course of action.

6. As regards this, the Poles have not co-ordinated with the Roumanians the defence of their two countries against German attack, since the Polish-Roumanian alliance operates in practice only in the contingency of a Russian attack. The Poles give as their reasons for this omission :—

(*a*) That Hungary would not dare attack Roumania nor allow German troops to pass through to do so. (Paragraph 4 of the Report.)

(*b*) That any German attack on Roumania would be open to a Polish counter-attack from the north-west flank, and that Germany would not therefore attack Roumania before she had dealt with Poland. (Paragraph 6 of the Report.)

* Enclosure No. II.

7. We are unable to accept these arguments as valid. A German attack on Roumania through Hungary seems quite a probability and it would be protected on the northern flank by the Carpathians. Consequently, any Polish counter-attack would meet with considerable difficulties. We recommend that the importance of defence collaboration against Germany should be urged upon both the Poles and the Roumanians. Such collaboration is essential if a solid front is to be formed in the East against German aggression.

Comparison of Forces. (Paragraphs 11–14 and Annexes I and II.)

8. The Polish conversations have not added materially to our knowledge of the military strengths of probable belligerents.

In general their estimate of the strength of the German Army agrees with ours, except as regards reserve divisions. The Poles estimate that the Germans can mobilise 28–30 Reserve Divisions whereas our estimate gives the same figure without taking into account Czech equipment. The Polish estimate of the German first-line air strength is slightly lower than ours.

9. The Polish view of their ability to resist Germany depends to a large extent upon their assessment of the fighting value of the German land forces which they place much lower than we do, and which is set out at some length in paragraph 25 of the Report. The War Office do not agree that the standard of training in the German forces is low and they consider that the efficiency of the mechanised units has been greatly improved since the time when Austria was occupied.

In general, therefore, we are of the opinion that the Poles tend to under-rate the German strength and over-rate their own.

Course of Operations.

(Paragraphs 11–27 and Annex III.)

Naval.

10. Annex III deals with the naval aspect of operations and we are in general agreement with the views expressed. We do not, however, agree that German naval attack on the coast is likely. (Paragraph 14.) Germany will more probably rely on land operations to make Polish naval bases useless.

It will be seen (paragraph 8 (i), Annex III) that the Polish naval plan is based upon the assumption that Hel will be available as a naval base. We think this is a very optimistic assumption if only on account of the heavy scale of air attack which the Germans could bring to bear at short ranges.

From paragraphs 20 and 21 of the Report it is clear that the General Staff do not expect to be able to cover Hel for long, and consequently unless Russia is an ally, the Polish naval forces will sooner or later be faced with the alternative of internment or running for the North Sea.

11. The Poles anticipate that Germany will transport certain troops through the Baltic from the neighbourhood of Hamburg to East Prussia, and they attach considerable importance to making plans for attacking any military transports. As the Polish Plan is to give up the corridor, this is most unlikely. The Poles have been informed that British Naval action in the Baltic would be confined to submarine raids. These could not be undertaken at the beginning of the war, which is the most important time for Poland, unless submarines could be stationed in the Baltic before the outbreak of war. Any submarines that could be made available for this duty would have to be taken from other duties and their activities would cease soon after the Polish bases had been destroyed. The presence of British submarines might have a value in making Germany concentrate in the Baltic greater anti-submarine forces than would be expected against Polish submarines alone. The operation of submarines through the Sond or Belts after an outbreak of war may be extremely difficult and of doubtful value, owing to the small effect that these submarines are likely to produce.

12. We note that the Poles have asked for monitors to assist in the defence of Hel. We do not recommend the employment of monitors for this purpose and in any case, none are available.

Land Operations.

German Offensive in the East.

13. We have already remarked that a German offensive directed against Roumania does not appear to have been considered. As regards the offensive against Poland, the Polish estimate of the German distribution of troops (in paragraph 15) allots some 10 divisions less to the defensive force in the West than our estimate, and correspondingly increases the striking force in the East.

14. In paragraph 17 of the report, the possibility is mentioned that a Corps may be transported from Hamburg by sea to East Prussia, to co-operate with a major advance from Pomerania. As we said in paragraph 11 above, we consider this unlikely. Except for this we have no comment on paragraphs 17–27 of the Report, and we endorse the view of our Delegation that the Poles are probably too optimistic regarding their ability to resist the German advance.

Main German Offensive in the West. (Paragraphs 52–54.)

15. It is clear from the report that the Poles have not properly examined the problem of what they could do in these circumstances. It is interesting to note also that they estimate that the Germans would allot 40 divisions for a defensive in the East, but that for a defensive in the West only 25 to 28 would be needed (paragraphs 15 and 53). This is another instance of under-estimation of the German and over-estimation of their own forces.

Air Operations.

16. These are dealt with mainly in Annex VII, where various courses of action for the Polish, German, French and British air forces are discussed. In paragraph 27, however, the view is expressed that even intensive air action on our part is unlikely "to do more than attract a few machines from the East." We consider that the degree of diversion which will be forced upon the German air forces will depend to a large extent upon the objectives we decide to attack, but we agree that at least in the early stages we cannot rely on being able to relieve the pressure on Poland to any material extent. This is a matter which has been dealt with fully in another paper (Paper No. C.O.S. 939 (also C.I.D. Paper No. D.P. (P.) 65)).

17. It should be noted that the Poles intend to employ their bombers in close support of their land forces irrespective of whether the main German offensive is directed against them or against the Western front (paragraph 54). We should, however, impress upon the Poles our view as to the importance of attack on more distant objectives, particularly on the large oil fuel reserves at Stettin or the naval base at Königsberg, which would have considerable value as a diversion. The former, in particular, is a most important objective. Polish action against Stettin would supplement our own air action against other oil objectives further west, and the success of the plan for attack on oil as a whole would have an immediate and substantial effect on Germany's capacity to continue a war. The Poles should therefore be urged to attack Stettin as soon as conditions permit.

We should, however, impress upon the Poles the necessity for reaching an agreed policy on the question of the air objectives to be attacked, on the lines of that which has been agreed with the French.

18. The Poles at present rely almost entirely upon A.A. guns and fighters for protection against German air attack, and have apparently not taken sufficient steps towards adopting camouflage or providing shelters. The weight and intensity of air attack to which Germany could subject them is rather more than 10 times as great as the heaviest experienced in Spain, and we should warn them that in our opinion adequate passive defence measures form an essential part of any modern system of air defence.

Allied Assistance.

19. This is a matter to which we have given full consideration in another paper (Paper No. C.O.S. 939, also C.I.D. Paper No. D.P. (P.) 65). The Poles will presumably be informed in due course of our decisions. With reference to certain

points specifically raised in this paper—paragraphs 49 (*b*) and (*d*)—the Air Staff are examining the possibility of operating a limited number of Bombers from Polish aerodromes which it may be possible to make use of as advanced operational bases provided that certain essential maintenance requirements and stocks of bombs can be established there in peace. Should the examination prove that these proposals are practicable, we recommend that discussions should be initiated with the Polish Staff on this subject, and that the Air Ministry should be authorised to despatch to Poland—together with the material which we are supplying to the Poles for their own use—such stocks of bombs and maintenance stores as could be spared from this country.

At the same time it should be pointed out that the object of operating from Polish aerodromes would be to allow our own aircraft to reach the more distant objectives in Eastern Germany and to cause the dispersion of German air defences.

Reserves and War Potential.

20. The Report draws attention (paragraphs 35–51, and Annex VII, paragraphs 13–17) to the difficulties with which the Poles will be faced in maintaining their war effort. They are apparently now less unwilling to accept Russian assistance in the supply of war material, but there are no doubt still many difficulties to be overcome. We should, however, impress upon the Poles that the only hope of getting appreciable supplies of material is to get them from Russia, as is pointed out in paragraph 45 of the Report.

21. With regard to British assistance in the supply of war material we understand that the Allied Demands Sub-Committee has made a full investigation into the Polish requirements and action is in hand to satisfy them in so far as it is possible.

Further Staff Contacts.

22. The Poles were anxious that further discussions between British and Polish Staff Officers should take place. We endorse this suggestion and, in view of the Polish desire that they should be conducted on a high level, suggest that the Chiefs of Staff might themselves receive a Polish delegation in London. In this connection we draw attention to paragraphs 49 and 50 of the Report, which show that the Poles hope that the Allies will be able to take some form of action early on which will have a real effect in reducing German pressure in the East. The problem has been dealt with in other Papers (C.I.D. Papers Nos. D.P. (P.) 59 and 65).

It is most important that it should be resolved as far as it can be in advance of the event, and at an early date.

It seems essential also to include French representation in any further conversations with the Poles.

(Signed) R. F. ADAM.
R. E. C. PEIRSE.
T. S. V. PHILLIPS.

Richmond Terrace, S.W. 1,
July 14, 1939.